9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1956)1962 NU31 Seri NU31

II

OUTLINE OF SERI CULTURE

161 At the moment their number should have increased again, after a disastrous epidemic in the 164 spring of 1955.

Biological Background

142 The Seris are somewhat atypical among the peoples of the general area in that they represent a very slender, sinewy, tall type. This is true of both men and women. This physical type in general is apt to be associated with the desert habitat and the Seris answer the requirements very well. As shall be seen, their economy also repre- ●433 sents characteristic adaptation to the desert conditions of pre-agricultural people.

Economy

The Seris readily fell into the category of the pre-agricultural hunters and gatherers with one variant, dependence on the produce of the sea, whether marine turtles, fish or littoral invertebrates.

[241] Here the Seri provide another exception for the region. They are the only group that never had any agriculture. McGee has pointed out their lack of agricultural sense and this has also been mentioned by Kroeber and by incidental Mexican visitors. Of late years, some efforts have been made by the Mexican government and the American Friends' Service Committee to persuade them [648] toward agriculture, but to no avail. The Seris [464] occasionally hire out to the surrounding Mexican or American rancher-farmers but grow restless after a few days of cotton picking and retire, with their advanced pay lost to the employer. On the other hand, efforts to teach them related practices, well digging for example, also failed to interest them. To this day they remain much in the original pattern of economy.

262 McGee (1898:214) who had a chance to observe 114 them from the first hand and who also had access to valuable information from the outsiders gives the following figures for their diet:

land game, large and small (incl. stolen stock)	21%
waterfowl and eggs, incl. pelican	13
sea-turtles	25
fish	15
shellfish	10
cactus fruit	9
other plants	6
miscellaneous	2

total animal 84% marine 65%

Kroeber (1930:20) questions these figures and thinks that shellfish represents greater percentage than McGee indicated. He also thinks the use of turtles had been exaggerated. He figures the dependence on the animal diet as 75% and on marine 60% but he suspects that these figures are too high for a band with ready access to countless cacti and mesquite.

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123 484 Then Chico Romero and his load of children and dogs arrived and he unloaded his impedimenta on the beach, and soon the women came walking along the beach and joined the party. The boats carrying the heavy things and children; the women, with their babies and a few light things on their heads, walk along the beach when possible and follow the boats, which hug the shore to avoid the strong currents and tide. The boats are propelled by paddles mostly, though some of the Indians use oars. The women are slightly built, slender and inclined to be gaunt, owing to the hard life and lack of food. Their cheek bones are quite prominent and their profiles present protruding lips.

422 [364] Having no permanent homes, moving hither and thither for their various food supply, household things are not accumulated and life is reduced to its very simplest elements and absolute necessities.

Crude baskets made from shoots of the torote tree, vessels in which to cook, and some patched rugs in place of Pelican skins to serve as blankets to the fortunate few, constitute the family possessions. Strange to relate, many of the women have an over-supply of milk, and according to Roberto have puppies nurse what the babies cannot take. One woman was known to nurse a baby pig on one side and a puppy on the other.

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[264] [864] Family dogs lick all cooking vessels which is unnecessary as they are thoroughly clean when the Seris are through with them, and also lick the infants clean after performing their natural functions, so they are quite indispensable. I saw a Seri girl place on the sand a small can of water for a dog and then saw her drink some of the remainder and pour the rest back in a five-gallon can. Dogs frequently swim across the Infernillo to join their masters.

732 Asked about cripples and incompetents, Roberto said they probably did not exist. The conditions of survival were too precarious to admit of anyone living who was unable, by physical disability, to hunt or fish. There are two or three men who are nearly blind or so. The wives of these men eke an uncertain living for them by the hardest struggle. The sea turtle is the staple; one man and one good boat can secure a living for five families. There are now nine boats, but one boat to a family would practically free them from continual want. With the exception of four bones in the flippers and the bones of the head, all the sea turtle is used---the meat, blood, entrails, shell which furnishes food and oil, skin of flippers which furnishes sandals, sinew for strings. Nothing is wasted except contents of the entrails.

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123 Again, we laid our blankets on the clean white sand of the shore and were lulled to rest by the murmuring sea.

123 484 Daylight found us up the next morning, and we breakfasted, rolled up our blankets, pushed the boats into the sea and were off by the time the sun rose over the mountains and shone over a glassy sea. Two Seris towed their boat by a tump line, while a boy of twelve steered